



Kimberly Chacon, from left, daughter Madison, son Landon and husband Enrico visit the lunar module room at the Cradle of Aviation Museum in Uniondale.



Christine Byrne helps granddaughter Allie Biehayn get into her firefighting gear at the Nassau County Firefighters Museum and Education Center.

CRADLE OF AVIATION MUSEUM AND EDUCATION CENTER

As soon as you enter the museum, look up! A U.S. Navy Blue Angel airplane flies from the ceiling of the three-story atrium.

That's just the beginning of your journey to see more than 75 aircraft and spacecraft in the air and on the ground in the museum. That includes what Parton calls the Cradle of Aviation's "crown jewel"—an actual lunar module built on Long Island that had been scheduled to head for the moon as Apollo 18 before NASA halted those missions in the 1970s.

Eight galleries trace the development of flight chronologically from kites and balloons, to pioneers such as Charles Lindbergh, to the commercial air industry, through the space program, to SpaceX and the future of flight. Artifacts, photos and grainy historic videos bring the stories to life, and visitors can climb into the cockpits on the "cockpit trail" and steer or control the planes. They can also virtually land a plane on an aircraft carrier and on a runway.

"They love the cockpits," volunteer docent Irwin Wolf, 86, of Great Neck, says of the children who visit. "Give them a cockpit with a button to push or a wheel to turn and they're happy."

The museum is in multiple original hangars of Mitchel Field Air Base that dates back to World War I. All of the aircraft were either built on Long Island or flown on Long Island, Parton says, so the museum

also offers a history of pilots, mechanics and designers on Long Island from 1909 through the space program. A photo exhibit features 12 Long Islanders who have been to space. The third floor holds an exhibit devoted to the history of Pan American Airlines.

The museum also offers a 300-seat domed planetarium theater that alternates planetarium shows with documentary films. A cafeteria offers hamburgers, hot dogs, pizza and other simple choices. A gift shop offers flight-related toys and other merchandise. And, for the littlest astronaut wannabes, the Junior Jet Club room for children 6 and younger has cartoon astronaut murals on the wall and climbable play equipment.

More than 300,000 visitors come to the museum each year, Parton says.

"The museum is one of my favorite places to bring students and my family," says Gabrielle Barry, 47, a teacher at Mill Neck Manor School for the Deaf who was on a field trip with her seventh and eighth graders. "The volume of how much aircraft history happened on Long Island astounds me every time."

NASSAU COUNTY FIREFIGHTERS MUSEUM AND EDUCATION CENTER

"This is the big hit of the museum," says Alana Petrocelli, executive director of the Nassau County Firefighters Museum and Education

Lots of fun options all IN A ROW

What to know about the aviation, firefighters and children's museums

BY BETH WHITEHOUSE
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Pretend you're an astronaut, or a firefighter, or a TV news anchor at the three museums that make up Museum Row in Uniondale.

There's the Cradle of Aviation Museum, the Nassau County Firefighters Museum and Education Center and the Long Island Children's Museum.

"I wouldn't say you could do all of them in a day. You'd have to have a lot of stamina," jokes Andrew Parton, president of the Cradle of Aviation. But each of the choices offers hours of entertainment for families. "When the weather is bad, it's a great place to come because it's nice and warm," Parton says. "It's a perfect place for a daycation."

ON THE COVER Ari Kumar enjoys the firefighters museum in Uniondale.

See MUSEUM on B4



Delve into exhibits on Museum Row

MUSEUM from B3

Center, gesturing to a fire engine from 1952 that kids can sit on and “drive.”

“That’s what they want to do — they want to put on gear and sit on a truck. And we let them do it,” Petrocelli says. The museum has firefighter coats and hats for the kids.

The museum displays 15 fire engines dating from the 1800s to the present. And while the flashy red trucks may be the main draw, there are also displays to educate children and families about fire prevention and safety. An interactive phone has kids practice calling 911, a display encourages families to have an exit drill and plan at their homes, and, of course, an interactive exhibit explains “stop, drop and roll.”

“This is a favorite. Our man comes down the pole,” Petrocelli says, pushing a button that brings a life-size firefighter doll sliding down the firehouse pole from the floor above. Another popular feature is the Junior Fire Safety Academy simulated house fire — children pick up a fire hose and aim it at a light-up “fire” until they’ve put it out.

A play area offers miniature fire trucks, and a setoff room offers play on smaller fire equipment for the littlest firefighters. And don’t forget to check out the display case filled with toy Dalmatians, the traditional firehouse mascot.

In addition, the museum has a variety of firefighter memorabilia, including tributes to firefighters lost on 9/11. And a gift shop offers firefighter-related toys and merchandise. The museum gets 50,000 visitors a year, Petrocelli says.

“He likes the trucks and the playground set up for toddlers,” Yali Zheng, 33, of Hicksville, says of her son, Declan, 3. Zheng visits the museum with her husband, Jesse Radefeld, 34, and their 10-month-old daughter, Monica. Even the grown-ups learn something — Radefeld says he was amazed

MORE INFO

Cradle of Aviation Museum and Education Center

Charles Lindbergh Boulevard, Uniondale

OPEN Tuesdays through Sundays 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

COST \$12, \$11 per child ages 2 to 12 for planetarium shows; \$18, \$16 per child for gallery; combo ticket \$25, \$23

MORE INFO 516-572-4111, cradleofaviation.org

Nassau County Firefighters Museum and Education Center

1 Charles Lindbergh Blvd., Uniondale

OPEN Winter hours are Tuesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and open on Mondays that fall on holidays and school breaks. Last admission is at 4:15 p.m.

COST \$7 per person
MORE INFO 516-572-4177, ncfiremuseum.org

Long Island Children's Museum

11 Davis Ave., Uniondale

OPEN Tuesday through Sunday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and most school holidays.

COST \$18 per person, shows are \$11 with museum admission, \$15 for theater only
MORE INFO 516-224-5800, licm.org

by the video that shows how fast a Christmas tree goes up in flames. He says he’ll be even more careful at home “now that I’ve actually seen what happens.”

LONG ISLAND CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

No hushed voices in this museum — as soon as you enter, you hear children engaged in play in this cavernous, colorful space.

From the Climb-It two-story, undulating net enclosed structure that children scamper up, to the Bubbles exhibit where families can stand inside bubbles that rise from the floor to surround their bodies, to a second story filled with gal-



Arianna Katz, of Little Neck, stacks ice cream scoops on a cone at the Long Island Children's Museum.

leries that let children build with blocks, become a TV news anchor, and make music with drums and household items such as spoons and colanders, the museum is a hands-on smorgasbord of activities.

A 140-seat theater offers three long-running productions a year. Each is interactive, with children frequently being called up on stage, says Jim Packard, theater program director. “We do shows that are family friendly, one hour or less. We tie them into the galleries,” he says. For instance, the next show, which runs Feb. 7 to March 21, is scheduled to be “Interstellar Cinderella,” a modern take on the fairy tale in which Cinderella is an engineer who fixes the prince’s spaceship. It ties into the museum’s next traveling exhibit, a “Moon to Mars” gallery, which opens Jan. 18 and runs through May 4.

Additional events include, for instance, a celebration of Lunar New Year on Jan. 25 and 26. A popular monthly

event is Splish Splash Animal Bath, during which the staff takes out the animals in the indoor Feast for Beasts exhibit and bathes them. It’s often the hedgehog, says Maureen Mangan, museum director of communications. Check the website for events and times.

The Tot Spot, geared for ages 4 and younger, includes Long Island-based play areas, including a lighthouse, the Garden City train station and a farm stand. That’s where Jessica Bein, 37, a teacher from Plainview, watches her son, Ben Neville, 22 months, make an interactive chicken lay an egg. “This is our first time here,” she says. “It’s a cool, interactive place to go. The bubbles were fun, he loved the music room and the blocks upstairs you can build with. Each exhibit was good enough to spend the entire day at. It’s been so engaging.”

There’s a cafeteria room where people can bring their own lunches or purchase something from the vending ma-

chines. The gift shop is a veritable toy store, with games, craft projects, plush animals and more.

According to museum surveys of visitors, the average stay is two and a half hours, say Mangan. Watch for a new permanent exhibit coming in October called “Saltwater Stories,” an exploration of Long Island’s maritime roots and traditions.

“It’s a great way to get out of the house and get some energy out,” says Jillian Gladstone, 43, an environmental consultant, as she watches her son, Adlai, 6, and her husband, Blake Ratcliff, 44, climbing up the Climb-It structure. The family is visiting Ratcliff’s parents in Wauatchag from Ecuador, where Ratcliff is a diplomat. Says Adlai after his climb: “I like it because there are a lot of different tunnels,” some of which hit a dead-end, forcing climbers to turn around and retrace. “When I climb and see my dad getting stuck, it’s the funniest thing ever.”